

Exploring the support and opportunities MATs can offer school staff working in SEND

A recent study by NFER explored the ways in which MATs are working to support pupils with SEND. We spoke with 49 SENCOs and MAT leaders across 19 MATs to better understand what they felt their MAT was doing well in relation to SEND and what this meant for pupils and staff. Visit nfer.ac.uk to read the full report **The MAT Factor: Exploring how multi-academy trusts are supporting pupils with SEND**.

What support can a MAT offer my SEND department?



- Additional training opportunities around SEND (both in-house and external), with senior leadership support.
- Resources to reduce SENCO administrative workload, including toolkits, templates, guidance, shared systems and IT support.
- Access to in-house specialist resources, such as legal support, speech and language therapists, counsellors, educational psychologists and family support workers, to alleviate pressures on the local authority.
- Regular constructive audits, identifying strengths and areas for development, and helping to prepare for Ofsted.
- In-house SENCO development programmes to support recruitment and retention.
- Additional financial resources for specific ambitions.

What does a MAT SEND leader do?



- Designated individual in the MAT leadership team with remit encompassing SEND and potentially other areas of inclusion as well.
- Crucial role in centralising SEND efforts, facilitating collaboration, and providing expertise and support to individual schools.
- Offers access to a higher levels of expertise and experience through guidance and mentoring conversations.
- Able to provide strategic oversight as not at the coalface.
- Onboarding support for new SENCOs and progression opportunities for experienced ones.

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How can I better collaborate with other schools?



- Collaboration supports knowledge-sharing, morale boosting and alleviating sense of isolation often experienced by SENCOs.
- SENCO meetings – once or twice per term, mix of remote and in-person, can be facilitated by MAT leadership but could also be coordinated locally with schools outside the MAT as well.
- Social messaging groups and informal exchanges with other MAT or local SENCOs.
- Drawing on Special School expertise and cooperating to provide pupils with tailored provision.
- Physical resource-sharing with local schools.
- Peer audits and school visits.

But it remains a very complex picture...

- SENCOs need to be able to respond to the specific needs of their pupils and context
- No single template for how MATs work – some require high levels of consistency and standardisation across schools, others very light-touch with minimum intervention.
- Even within a MAT, inconsistencies between LAs can result in very different situations across the schools.
- Geographical distribution and SENCO workload can make collaboration challenging.
- MATs and schools within them still face challenges with LAs who, like schools, continue to face significant staffing and financial pressures.
- Being part of a MAT can sometimes lead to increased workload and higher levels of scrutiny.